

The Washington Post

You were generous in the space you devoted to Joseph Goulden's interesting article on The Washington Post [October 1970]. He made many points with which I might disagree but, no doubt, seem valid to him. But I wish to correct for your record and ours the major errors of fact it contained.

It is good drama and good reading to depict offices—newspaper offices, in particular—as “lions dens” of intrigue in which the corpses of victims are heaved out while the grinning victor munches with delight on a piece of leg.

I would not pretend that any office, this one included, is devoid of politics and maneuverings. But there is more to management than politics. When new managers are brought in, it is predictable and inevitable that they will build their own staffs. That has occurred on The Post since 1965 when Ben Bradlee was brought in to manage the news department. He assembled his own staff and Mr. Goulden reads into that process plots and struggles that did not occur.

Bradlee's predecessor, Alfred Friendly, is my good friend as well as my colleague. For 10 years he guided the editorial growth of The Post to a place of distinction in American journalism. At the urging of my husband, he had accepted that assignment reluctantly and only on condition that he could one day return to writing. My husband agreed to those terms and they were honored by me.

The most hurtful, damaging, and nutty accusation of the Goulden article was that Bradlee, unsatisfied with control of the news department, sought to control the business side of this newspaper, too.

The fact is that John Sweeterman, the President and Publisher of The Post, came to me and to our board chairman, Frederick S. Beebe, to ask for semi-retirement and an advisory position in the company because of purely personal circumstances. That occurred a year before Bradlee knew anything about it.

We hoped that Mr. Sweeterman would change his mind and we successfully postponed his decision to give him time to reconsider. He had been of the utmost importance to the growth and prosperity of The Post and no one—including Ben Bradlee—wanted him to step down.

After several months of reconsideration, Mr. Sweeterman insisted that for personal reasons it had become imperative for him to take a less active role in the company. At that point, Mr. Beebe, Mr. Sweeterman, and I set out to find a successor. Our choice was Paul Ignatius who was leaving government after more than seven years and who came to our attention through outside recommendations. He was described by Mr. Goulden as my “tennis playing friend.” In fact, I had never met him prior to this time.

At no point during the search for Mr. Sweeterman's successor did Ben Bradlee suggest himself, nor was he ever considered for it.

I would like to add a word on titles, which seemed to intrigue Mr. Goulden. Mr. Bradlee was given the title of executive editor upon the retirement of J. Russell Wiggins, the superb and loyal editor of the paper before him. At that time, I took back the title of publisher which my father and my husband had both used and also resumed responsibility for the editorial page, an arrangement that existed when Herbert Elliston was the editor. This change was suggested by Mr. Bradlee himself. He at no time appeared as “editor” on the masthead as your story alleged.

I believe and hope that management decisions in this company are made thoughtfully by responsible people; not by power struggles on the one hand or whim on the other.

KATHARINE GRAHAM
 President
 The Washington Post